



CALIFORNIA FIRE CHIEFS ASSOCIATION

15 Mission Olive Court Oroville, CA 94966

(530) 589-4692

FAX (530) 589-4694

calchiefs@msn.com

Fire Chief Dave Carlson, Immediate Past President
California Fire Chiefs' Association, Remarks to the California
Performance Review Committee, September 10, 2004

Good afternoon. I am here representing the 1,100 members of the California Fire Chiefs Association.

We appreciate your willingness to hear our viewpoint today. We are excited about the changes in the California Performance Review Report and committed to a higher level of accountability and efficiency.

We support PS 01 creating a Department of Public Safety and Homeland Security. This consolidated effort can improve communication and coordination of emergency services. In order to be effective, the unified command structure must be utilized. A balance between law enforcement and other emergency services must be maintained.

We believe PS 03, Creating a Division of Fire Protection and Emergency Management, will provide a better framework to manage disasters in the state. Nearly all of the disasters occurring in California are currently managed by a combination of the agencies listed for consolidation in PS 03. One of the most encouraging changes is the inclusion of the Emergency Medical Services Agency.

The process identified in PS 10, Establishing a Contingency Fund for the Director of the Governor's Office of Emergency Services, is a smart and proactive public policy that assures funds for initial response of needed resources in an emergency.

The major area of concern in the CPR report for the California fire service is in the infrastructure recommendations. Frankly we were a little surprised that the California Fire Chiefs' Association was not contacted prior to the development of the initial CPR report.

We believe several suggested changes in the initial CPR report will actually hurt public safety in our state. If enacted they will severely limit the input of the fire service in influencing safety codes for California. One specific area of concern is in Chapter 4, INF. 26, Building Standards Adoption Reform.

Last year, the Building Standards Commission voted to adopt model building and fire codes developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) as the basis for statewide building and fire codes in California. Your report states that these codes were adopted amid heavy opposition and very little support. This is completely untrue.

NFPA codes were supported by the California Fire Chiefs and the California Metropolitan Fire Chiefs associations, along with many other organizations. Neither Cal Chiefs nor Metro Chiefs were contacted by CPR staff for input about the state's decision to select NFPA's codes. Instead, it looks like staff only talked to people who were opposed to the NFPA codes.

The reason the California Fire Chiefs' Association supported the NFPA codes was because NFPA supports the fire service and other first responders much more effectively than other code developers.

NFPA codes are developed after consensus is reached among all interested parties. Everyone who is interested can participate fully including industry. In contrast, the other codes that were evaluated by the state are created through a process that allows only code enforcement officials to vote. In our view, the NFPA process typically results in safer codes.

One other important point that we would like to make: NFPA investigates major fires and utilizes that information to make its building and fire codes even more safe. Making codes better saves lives ... We want our codes to be created through a process that takes advantage of all of that information.

Apart from the code issue, we have some other concerns about the CPR report. The report recommends the elimination of the Office of the State Fire Marshal, the State Board of Fire Services and the Fire and Life Safety Advisory Board. This would actually eliminate the ability of members of the fire service to affect decisions about safety in California. Actually, we think most Californians would want to know that firefighters, fire marshals, fire prevention officers and fire chiefs have a real say in which safety codes and regulations affect fire safety in California.

These are the only organizations that provide a strong and consistent resource for local fire agencies. They provide a forum for local government fire agencies to provide input in the following areas:

- Mutual Aid process and resource usage.
- Development and enforcement of state laws relating to assembly occupancies and related businesses.
- Statewide training, education and certification.
- Fire and arson investigation.
- Incident reporting process.

These are critical components of the Fire and Life Safety services in California. They have been seriously deteriorating over the last several years and this needs to be addressed.

Unfortunately, we believe that the recommendations in this initial INF report would completely exclude the fire service and deprive the state of much needed input in the adoption of safety codes we are asked to enforce.

We hope that you will accept the view of the fire service in our preceding comments and include us in the discussions prior to the implementation of the recommendations.

Thank you.